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Playground and Garden Design: Troy Christian Early Childhood Education Center

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**Playground and Garden Design:
Troy Christian Early Childhood Education Center**

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Honors Project

Submitted to the Honors College
at Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for graduation with

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Table of Contents

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	3
<u>PROJECT OVERVIEW</u>	4
<u>COMPLETED NARRATIVE AND VISUALS- GARDEN</u>	6
<u>COMPLETED NARRATIVE AND VISUALS - PLAYGROUND</u>	8
<u>PROJECT STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS</u>	11
<u>CONCLUSIONS</u>	12
<u>REFERENCES</u>	13

Introduction

The Troy Christian Early Childhood Education Center (TC ECEC) Director was seeking research, marketing standpoints, and a re-design for their playground and garden which led to an academic and professional collaboration that crosses into multiple project typologies. The Director consulted with Gabriella Spatz to create a list of necessary inclusions in both spaces and produce two research questions as a result. The primary research question was: “What playground and garden design, layout, and individual elements would best suit the TC ECEC?” A secondary question was: “How do the playground and garden design presented foster an environment of comfort, safety, and explorative inquisition that will assist the children in their mental, physical, and social development?”

The images below of the garden and playground spaces were taken at the beginning of the project and provide relevant context for the re-design and development of the spaces.

Garden Views – January 2021



Playground Views – January 2021



Project Overview

The project narrative and programmatic needs were primarily derived from an interview with the TC ECEC director. These interviews and meeting sessions continued throughout Fall of 2020 and Spring of 2021 to uncover more detailed goals for the specific designs. (The TC ECEC curriculum director also participated in one meeting.) To begin, I visited the site multiple times for pictures, inventory assessment, spatial awareness, and some measurements. This inspired initial site studies, sketches and preliminary designs. These ideas built upon existing research on safety standards, playground and garden typologies, and heuristic play and were accompanied by bi-weekly meetings with both faculty advisors. For reference, heuristic can be defined as “enabling a person to discover or learn something for themselves.” (Schoolhouse Daycare, 2018). A site visit with architectural advisor, Patrick, and the client provided the next level of safety-related information needed to proceed and led to several virtual meetings with two members of the Dayton Metroparks staff. They consulted on the design and provided several

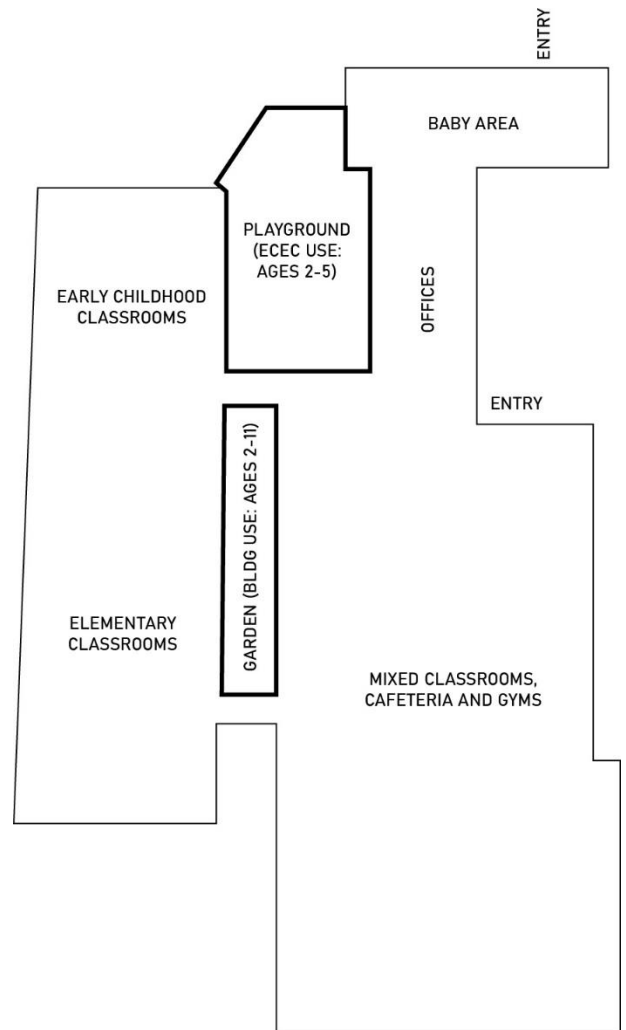
existing playgrounds and gardens as reference. I took a step back following a meeting with them to re-evaluate the project narrative and intentions. Finally, I settled on plans that fit the goals and vision of all involved and meet many, if not all, of the research objectives. These designs are prescriptive solutions to existing design concerns to amplify the success and learning capabilities of both spaces.

The images below provide an aerial view of both spaces and a programmatic use plan of the interior of all spaces surrounding the project's target areas.

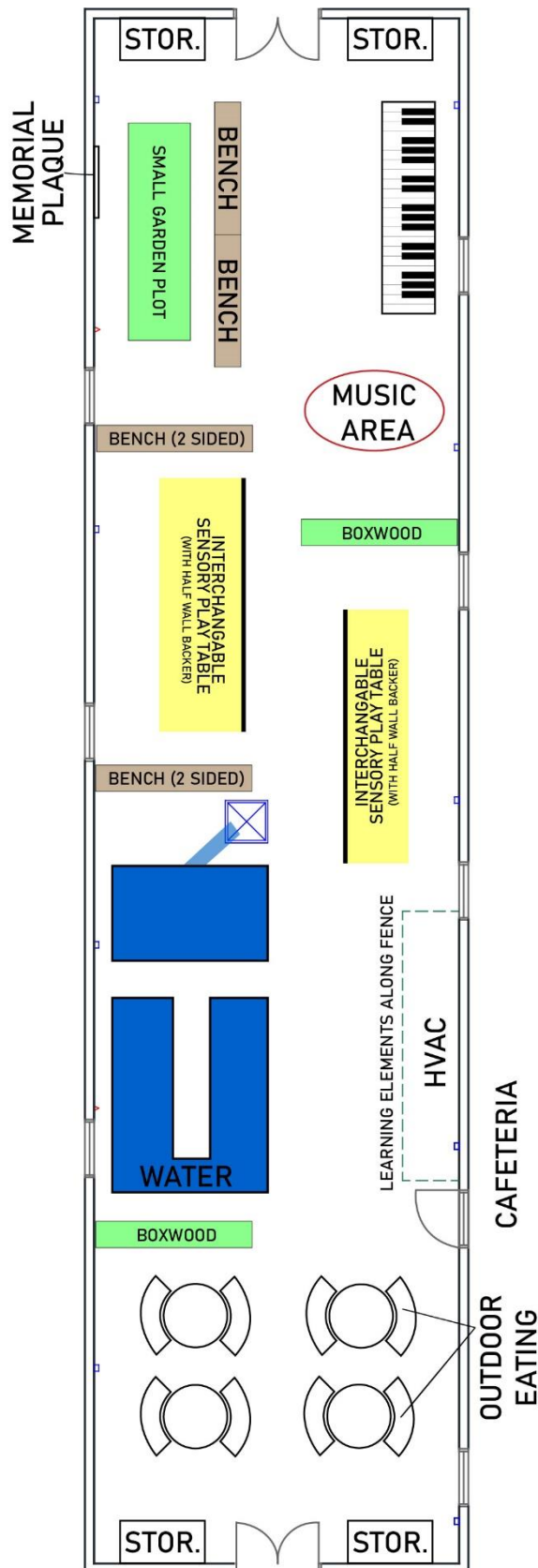
Aerial View



Use Plan



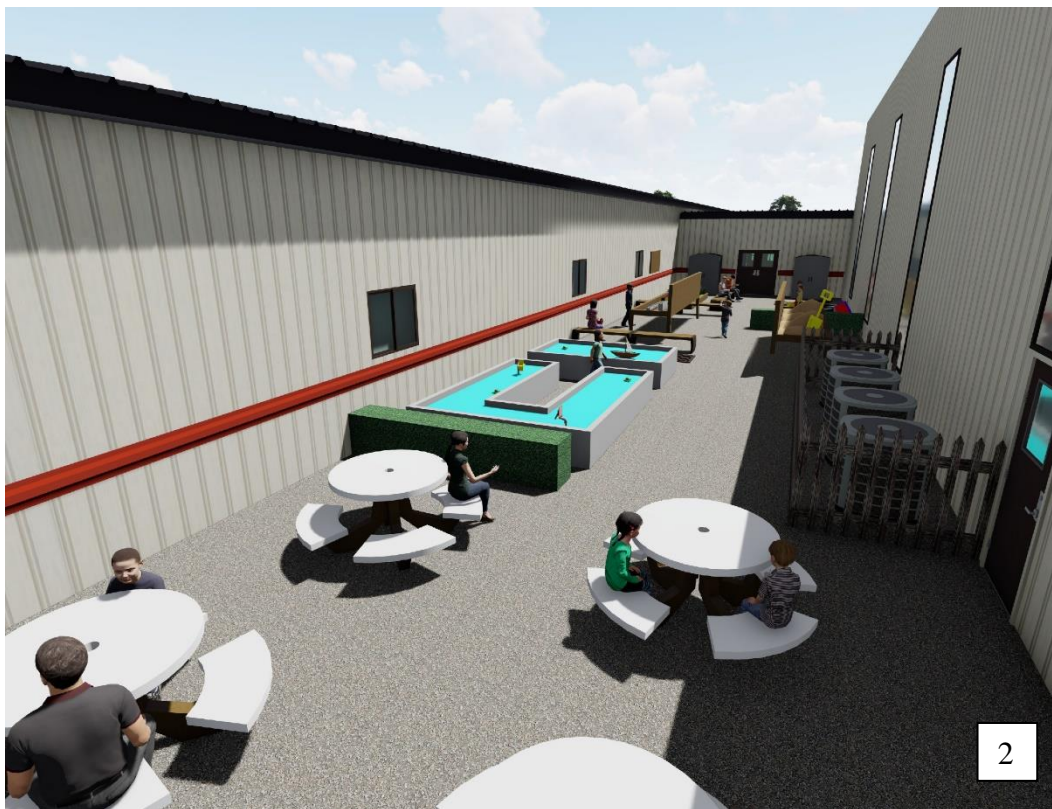
Completed Narrative and Visuals- Garden



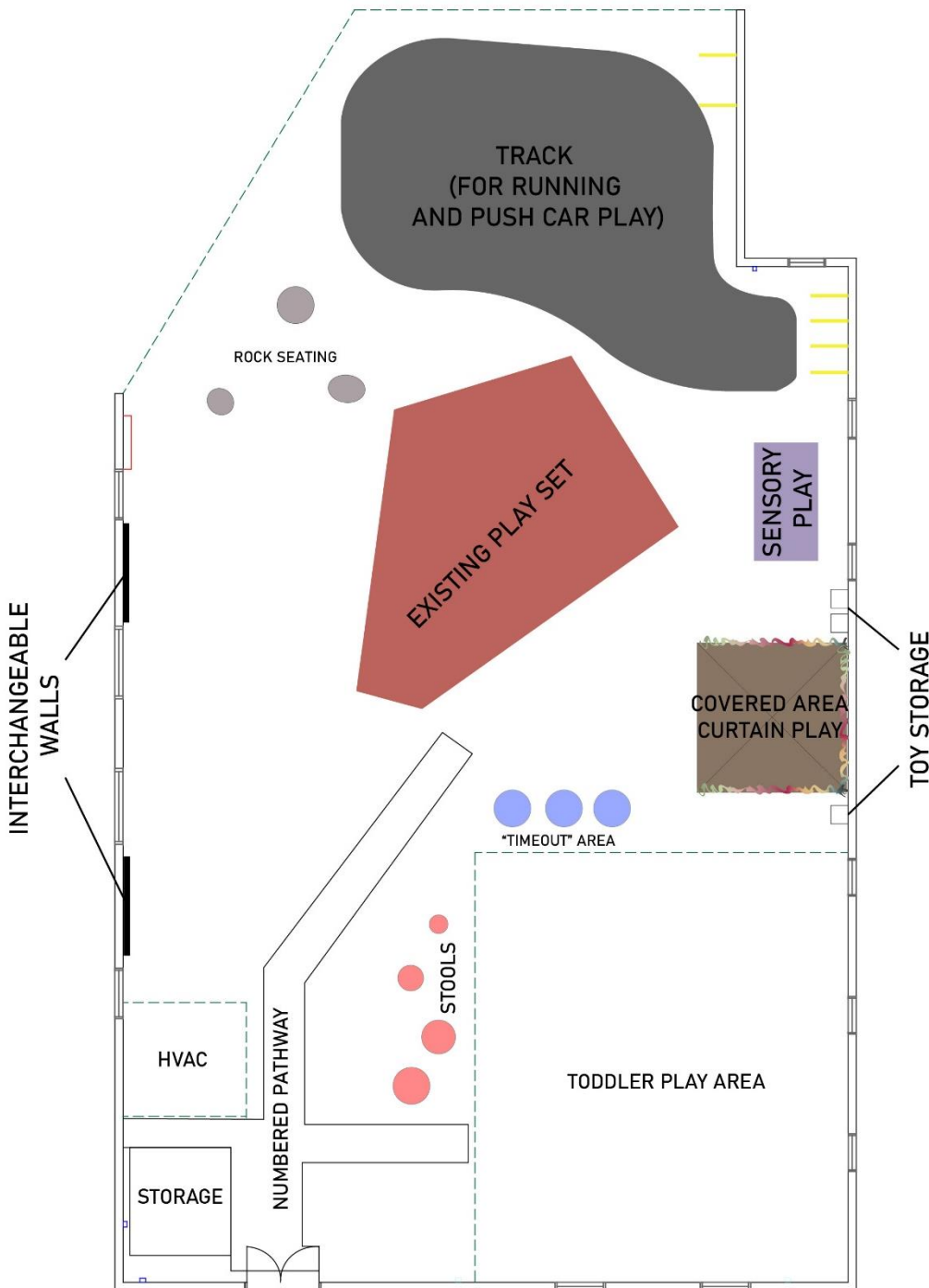
NARRATIVE AND FLOOR PLAN

In pursuing a garden design, it was vital to invigorate both the academic and independent play aspects of the space. Each area, as separated by visual and physical barriers (benches, boxwoods, and circulation paths) facilitates separated classroom spaces, independent and guided heuristic activity, and exposure to real-world science, art and sensory concepts. The circulation throughout the space guides visitors to recognize each separated task area as well as the space holistically. The space will also gain new life with the inclusion of a new door from the ECEC cafeteria. The elements included within the space create a safe and engaging environment for all ages, learning styles and exceptionalities.

The visuals below display a three-dimensional view of the above floor plans. The elements from the floor plans were modeled and included and sample students and teachers were added for realism.



Completed Narrative and Visuals - Playground



NARRATIVE AND FLOOR PLAN

The goal with the playground was to give more play areas and add vibrance to the features besides the central playset. By implementing vertical interchangeable wall pieces on the left wall, I am increasing the possibility for new activities without taking up much space. Similarly, use of colorful learning features along the fences will bring new life and educational opportunities to the space. The children will have more structure in their play, but also many more choices than they did before.

The visuals below display a three-dimensional view of the above floor plans. The elements from the floor plans were modeled and included and sample students and teachers were added for realism.





Project Strengths and Limitations

As with any project, the playground and garden re-design was a process of development and acknowledging strengths and limitations in all regards. As a primary strength, the project filled an existing need within a small community. This should lead to redevelopment of both spaces that builds upon the research, ideas and visuals provided. Secondly, the project provided a unique perspective on educational design as I intersected previous experience as a teacher and architectural student to produce the designs. Specialization in the architecture profession has limited some possibilities of new theories and ideologies, whereas this project expanded upon integration of past experiences with new discoveries. Also, as it was connected to a specific client, the project superimposed academia upon real-world application, which is unique to a capstone or thesis experience. Finally, the project's result met the original intent of providing a safe space for children to play and explore.

Many of the project's limitations revolved around the extreme and abrupt changes provided by the events of 2020 and 2021. Since the project took place within COVID-19 circumstances, I was unable to interview teachers, students, or the community about the design of the project. This led to a slightly vacuum-like design process which limits my final design. Moving forward, I aim to get the target audience, the children, involved in design feedback and improvements. Due to my limited knowledge of landscape design, the sketches and design iterations only had 4-8 weeks to develop following meetings with the landscape design professionals. In the world of architecture, this process would take an extended period of time to design and complete. This limited my graphics and visualization productions at the end of the project, but also limited the number of iterations that I produced throughout the semester. Finally, although the budget was less of a factor in the design than it would normally be,

consideration was given to financial constraints and reuse of existing items which limited the client's initial vision for the project. Eventually, following the site visit with Patrick, financial concerns were eliminated as a factor in the academic and marketing plan. In other words, several of the design ideas may become financially unrealistic once this project moves forward.

Conclusions

A deep study of these sites not only led to the produced designs above, it also helped clarify the plethora of options within a singular site or space. A real community project involves an army of voices and opinions, therefore additional input from stakeholders will influence the final outcome. In working with faculty advisors and landscaping professionals, I was able to produce a design that met the client's initial requests, and exceeded expectations from original programmatic requirements. This process also helped elucidate the amount of work that goes into marketing and pre-design services, often for no gain to the architect or firm. Overall, I was able to expand my experience area to include landscapes, playgrounds, and gardens.

Moving forward, I intend to deliver the project result to the client as a marketing piece. The information, designs, and visuals will be used to relay the importance of revitalizing both existing play spaces to the school board members and administration. I acknowledge that as marketing materials, the majority of this work will simply be used to garner interest amongst the stakeholders and that there is more work to be done before this plan could be put into action and realized. However, this applied project has provided a service to an entity that might not otherwise pursue details required to implement a full re-design. I am excited to transfer this academic capstone experience into further design and research work for TC ECEC.

References

Schoolhouse Daycare. (2018, March 03). What Is Heuristic Play and Why Is It Good for Our Children? Retrieved October 01, 2020, from <https://schoolhouse-daycare.co.uk/blog/heuristic-play/>